

# Identification, uniqueness and art consumption among bicultural consumers

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore how bicultural consumers differ from monocultural consumers in terms of personality traits and identity negotiation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Through a multidisciplinary literature review, some anecdotally and qualitatively supported differences between biculturals and monoculturals are reviewed and formulated as hypotheses, and a survey is used to collect quantitative data from a mixed random-purposeful sample.

**Findings** – Relative to monoculturals, biculturals exhibit greater concern about their acceptability within pertinent reference groups and society at large; have comparable levels of need for uniqueness and art enthusiasm; and consume more artwork as a means and in the process of their routine negotiation of (ethnic) identity. Ethnicity, need for social acceptability, need for group identification, and art enthusiasm are predictors of artwork consumption. Ethnicity, in particular, is a key precursor of artwork consumption.

**Research limitations/implications** – As a starting-point for understanding the bicultural consumer, the study is subject to exploratory research limitations.

**Originality/value** – As partial manifestations of globalization, businesses are challenged today in several ways by the rise and proliferation of the bicultural neotribe. Businesses do not have to fall victim to these challenges; they can turn them around and strategically leverage them as marketplace opportunities. The study provides some early insights that can help businesses to leverage such opportunities.

**Keywords** Cross-cultural management, Ethnic groups, Identification

**Paper type** Research paper

**An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.**

## Introduction

Multicultural consumers comprise an important, yet neglected, market segment (Nwankwo *et al.*, 1997). While businesses are increasingly embracing people with mixed identities and adapting their marketing strategies accordingly, the academic research on multicultural consumers is limited to a scanty stream in the information processing tradition (Hong *et al.*, 2000; LaFromboise *et al.*, 1993; Lau-Gesk, 2003). This paper draws on an interdisciplinary body of knowledge to understand how biculturals differ from other consumers in terms of personality traits and identity negotiation. Specifically, it examines biculturals relative to monoculturals on two counts:

- 1 social acceptability, group identification, and uniqueness needs; and
- 2 identity negotiation through consumption of market-mediated objects.

In line with past research (e.g. Bowles, 1993; Fields, 1996), this paper focuses on consumers whose biculturalism is due to their mixed ethnic identities, and defines a bicultural

consumer as an individual who perceives to have a mixed ethnic identity. The study of ethnic identity is an effective way to understand cultural minorities (e.g. Lindridge and Dibb, 2002; Williams and Qualls, 1989). In fact, the terms ethnic marketing and multicultural marketing are often used interchangeably (Nwankwo *et al.*, 1997). Among the plethora of market-mediated objects, the focus will be on works of art, which qualify as a prime means of consumer identity negotiation (Zolfagharian and Jordan, 2007).

The paper first reviews the interdisciplinary research on biculturals, their personality traits and artwork consumption to derive substantive hypotheses. It then reports on an empirical study undertaken to examine these hypotheses. The findings are discussed and research limitations and implications are explicated.

## Conceptual framework

### Mixed identity

Thanks to the various forms of globalization fueled by advancements in transportation, telecommunication and information technologies, the twenty-first century cultures are blending at an unprecedented rate (Maffesoli, 1996). As a result, new and mixed consumer identities are proliferating around the world. Against this backdrop, bicultural identity is emerging as one of the key contemporary consumer categories (Perlmann, 1997; Lau-Gesk, 2003).

At least three trends underscore the significance of consumers whose mixed ethnic identities qualify them as biculturals. First, ethnic identities have survived over thousands of years (Anderson, 1983). Some earlier social scientists (e.g. Marx, 1873; Weber, 1925) predicted that ethnicity would disappear in the process of economic

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production and with modernity and rationalization (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970). Ethnic identity, however, has withstood all kinds of societal changes to resurge as a robust social force in the contemporary era (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998). The second trend is the dramatic increase in interethnic marriages in recent decades, resulting in a bicultural baby boom (Perlmann, 1997). This has been reinforced by the celebration of ethnic pride, inception of Civil Rights, eradication of antimiscegenation laws, and escalation of immigration (Wallace, 2001). The protracted objection to the exclusion of bicultural population as a distinct category in 2000 census in the USA further magnifies the social significance of this segment (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002). The third trend is the emergence of niche marketing and mass customization as marketing strategies, supported by remarkable advancements in technological possibilities (Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998). These strategies and technologies enable firms to zoom in on narrowly defined, micro segments such as bicultural consumers. Brownlie *et al.* (1994) argue that failure to recognize emerging segments such as biculturals can distort the firm's understanding of the marketplace.

Much of the psychological research on ethnic identity views ethnicity as a meaning that others (e.g. friends, strangers, researchers) assign to an individual (Gibbs, 1997). This research, however, regards ethnic identity as a cultural meaning asserted by the individual him- or herself. Two reasons underlie this approach. First, multiethnic consumers have voluntarily demanded that the U.S. government officially recognize them as a distinct ethnic category for census and other identification purposes (Perlmann, 1997). Therefore, mixed identities are asserted rather than assigned. Second, a widespread shift is taking place around the globe in the way (ethnic) identity is defined and determined. For instance, US Census Bureau now rejects any biologically anchored definitions of ethnic identity and empowers the consumer to assert his or her ethnic identity. Therefore, this research will allow the consumer to assert his or her own ethnic identity.

### Key personality traits

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) review the interdisciplinary research on multiethnic identity and recognize two dominant theories undergirding the literature:

- 1 identity formation rooted in the psychoanalytic approach; and
- 2 symbolic interactionism developed primarily in sociology and anthropology.

In identity formation theory, ethnic-identity development parallels ego-identity formation with both emerging during adolescence when one is essentially preoccupied with developing and maintaining a stable self-concept (see Gibbs, 1997). Researchers investigating identity through this theoretical lens describe biculturals as agents of identity who develop a contingent sense of self in relation to and interaction with the environment and who integrate and/or alternate between their multiple selves in an attempt to maintain harmony with social surroundings and cultural cues embedded in the environment (Bowles, 1993; Herring, 1995).

Symbolic interactionism theory stresses the symbolic aspect of identity and regards all human words, actions and objects as signs reflecting certain socio-culturally constructed

meanings. This theory defines self as a set of meanings in constant evolution and negotiation (Blumer, 1969; Du Gay, 1996). Researchers who examine bicultural identity from this standpoint argue that consumers learn and interpret words, actions and objects by their meanings, which emerge and change through a myriad of social interactions (Blumer, 1969).

Taken together, these two literatures suggest that biculturals have lower self-esteem, higher ethnic identity confusion, and more psychological and behavioral problems; possess high levels of urge for belongingness and identification; and adopt the symbolic attitudes and behaviors (such as dress, speech, or décor style) of one or multiple of their ethnicities in an exaggerated manner, especially when they perceive problems with their minority identities (Faulkner and Kich, 1983; Gibbs, 1997; Piskacek and Golub, 1973; Gordon, 1964; Herring, 1992). Since biculturals face more than one possibility during identity negotiations, the number and/or diversity of social groups and communities they might aspire to, or have to, identify with is larger than those of other consumers (Rockquemore and Brunnsma, 2002). As a result, biculturals are more likely than other consumers to try to align their identities with the values and norms of certain groups and with those of society at large.

*H1.* Biculturals exhibit higher need for social acceptability than monoculturals.

*H2.* Biculturals exhibit higher need for group identification than monoculturals.

The findings regarding need for uniqueness among biculturals are mixed. While some researchers provide evidence for the relative lack of need for uniqueness among biculturals (Piskacek and Golub, 1973; Gibbs, 1973), other researchers find support for the existence of equal or even higher levels of need for uniqueness among these consumers (Fields, 1996; Cauce *et al.*, 1992; Gibbs and Hines, 1992; Gay, 1987; Johnson and Nagoshi, 1986). Since the weight of the evidence is almost equally distributed between these two standpoints and a recent qualitative study suggests comparability of biculturals to monoculturals in terms of need for uniqueness (Zolfagharian and Jordan, 2007), it might be safe to assume a lack of significant difference between the two groups.

*H3.* Biculturals don't differ from monoculturals in terms of need for uniqueness.

### Identity negotiation through art consumption

Consumers often draw on material culture to develop a lucid sense of self and to negotiate their identities with others (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). One way in which people interact and negotiate their identities is by consuming market-mediated objects including virtually all of the products and services in the marketplace (Bourdieu, 1984). Since artwork consumption is a prime example of market-mediated negotiation of identity, this paper will focus on consumer experiences with tangible works of art. Every artwork bears meanings on its production, display, and consumption (Prior, 2002). Meanings are generated by the creators (e.g. a painter), commercial mediators (e.g. art trader), and consumers (e.g. amateur collectors) of artwork. These three stakeholders, by creating and adopting artistic objects, generate symbolic spaces for, and simultaneously engage in, identity negotiation.

Consumers of artwork identify themselves, often subconsciously, with certain social meanings and roles. These consumers feel and are tied to actually or metaphorically natural things (e.g. land, water, mountain) in artwork; and in everything natural, there is always something inevitable that links members of a community (Anderson, 1983). Members of ethnic groups, for example, are assimilated to skin-color, gender, parentage, and birth-context that they perceive in certain artwork. Consumption of artwork is analogous to a mirror reflecting to the world more than to oneself one's unspoken and invisible cognitive and emotive attitudes, which make up his or her identity or image. Therefore, consumers who purchase and use artwork engage, knowingly or unknowingly, in communication and negotiation of their multifaceted identities.

Art helps one to successfully carry out membership in a given community or society by reducing tension, anxiety, and frustration; providing aesthetic pleasure; and reflecting and reinforcing proper relationships (Hatcher, 1999). Biculturals, who strive to identify with one or multiple ethnic identities, may find art consumption a convenient means. Wallace (2001), as cited in Zolfagharian and Jordan (2007), suggests that biculturals, when describing their identities, are very likely to refer to the material aspects of a community's culture such as food, customs, traditions, celebrations, and arts. In a similar vein, Bhattacharya *et al.* (1995) implicate that consumer's needs for social acceptability and group identification are positively associated with their membership in art institutions. In summary, artwork is an ideal means for exchanging symbolic meanings when consumers engage in identity negotiation. Artwork creates bonds between consumers and their deep-seated ethnic origins. Biculturals, compared to monoculturals, are likely to purchase and collect more artwork because they are more strongly concerned with their identity and acceptability across a variety of social circles and more appreciative of cultural diversity (Price, 1999).

#### H4. Biculturals consume more artwork than monoculturals.

Furthermore, Price (2002) finds that when consumers (i.e. biculturals and monoculturals alike) are asked to talk about their artistic consumption, they tend to allude to their ethnic identities, relationship with others, and identification with certain societal meanings. In a similar vein, Zolfagharian and Jordan (2007) suggest that a consumer's artwork consumption can be predicted through an investigation of his or her asserted ethnic identity and needs for social acceptability, group identification and uniqueness.

H5. Artwork consumption can be predicted by (a) need for social acceptability, (b) need for group identification, (c) need for uniqueness, and (d) asserted ethnic identity.

## Method

### The instrument

The instrument was partially borrowed and partially developed. To avoid the diversity of bicultural and monocultural identities, which can cause confounding effects, the study focused on a contrast between Caucasian Americans with an asserted monoethnic identity and Mexican

Americans with an asserted biethnic identity. Ethnic identity ( $E_I$ ) was captured using a categorical item that asked respondents to indicate whether they considered themselves to be Caucasian or Mexican or Mixed Caucasian-Mexican. This approach allowed respondents to assert whether they had monocultural or bicultural identities regardless of the ethnicities of their parents and of the meanings others might have assigned to them.

Need for social acceptability ( $N_{SA}$ ) and need for group identification ( $N_{GI}$ ) were measured using a six-item and a seven-item scales, respectively. The items in these scales were developed based on Zolfagharian and Jordan's (2007) qualitative study of biculturals (see Table I). The CNFU scale (Tian *et al.*, 2001) was adapted to measure need for uniqueness ( $N_U$ ). This scale consists of three dimensions: creative, unpopular, and minority choices. Tepper-Tian *et al.* (2001) report reliability measures of 0.81 and 0.73 for one- and two-year separated retests, respectively. Since general interest in art can motivate heavy consumption of artwork regardless of one's ethnic identity, art enthusiasm ( $A_E$ ) was included as a control variable.  $A_E$  items were adapted from Lumpkin (1985), who reported a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.74.

After reverse-coding some of the items, the scales were randomly sequenced to reduce systematic error. The items measuring  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ ,  $N_U$  and  $A_E$  were on a five-point Likert scale, anchored between "strongly agree" (5) and strongly disagree (1).  $E_I$  and artwork consumption ( $A_C$ ) were dichotomous and ratio scales, respectively.  $A_C$  was measured by asking respondents to write how many works of art they owned. Although positively skewed (0.71),  $A_C$  distribution satisfied the approximate normality condition (Huck, 2004, p. 30). Finally, six demographic questions (i.e. sex, age, religion, education, occupation, annual household income) were added to the end of the questionnaire.

**Table I** Results of Varimax-rotated principal components analysis for  $N_{SA}$  and  $N_{GI}$

Item	$N_{SA}$	$N_{GI}$
I always try to impress strangers	0.77	0.32
I strive to enhance my public desirability	0.75	
I do not care about what strangers think about me (reverse coded)	0.70	
My image before the public is extremely important to me	0.67	0.30
I do not need to be sociable with strangers (reverse coded)	0.60	
I always seek to improve my relationship with those I care about		0.71
I try hard to be an acceptable member of my expanded family		0.69
I am not really focused on becoming a desired friend for others (reverse coded)	0.33	0.64
I highly identify with the social groups I belong to		0.62
I have no interest in impressing the people I know		0.58
Variance explained	39	32

### Pilot study

To capture monoculturals with a White Caucasian ethnic identity and biculturals with a Mexican American ethnic identity, the pilot study was conducted using undergraduate students at an American university located near the Mexican border. The multicultural center of the university helped recruit 53 bicultural and 67 monocultural students. The mean age was 23. About 55 percent of the respondents were female.  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ ,  $N_U$ , and  $A_E$  were subjected to Varimax rotated principal components analysis. The observed factor structures for  $N_U$  and  $A_E$  were consistent with those observed by their developers.  $N_{SA}$  and  $N_{GI}$  scales, however required dropping one and two items, respectively. After dropping these items, an acceptable factor structure emerged per scale.  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ ,  $N_U$ , and  $A_E$  showed Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.80, 0.77, 0.83, and 0.74, respectively. The pilot study helped refine the instrument and make minor wording improvements to the adapted scales.

### Main study

Respondents in the main survey were contacted with the aid of 42 undergraduate students of marketing at a major university located in Southwest USA. This method of data collection is not new and has been advantageously used in marketing literature (Ganesh *et al.*, 2007). Each student used Yellow Pages to contact 40 consumers in three nearby cities. The students were instructed to randomize the selection of listings by calling only the first in each block of ten listings, recruit only non-student, professional adults who were at least 18 years old, and brief the potential respondents with pertinent information such as the approximate date and duration of the survey and preferred address. Of the 1,680 people contacted (40 per student), 248 agreed to participate and received a questionnaire by mail. Of the 189 returned responses, 178 were usable. The sample included 98 monoculturals and 80 biculturals.

The sample included almost equal number of males ( $n = 85$ ) and females. The average education level was "some college". Over 60 percent of respondents were between 26 and 35 years of age and social class distribution was rather normal with an average of middle class. Cross-tab tests between early and late respondents using  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ ,  $N_U$ , and  $A_E$  indicated the data was not unduly influenced by non-response bias.

Respondents were asked to specify what possessions of theirs qualified as artwork. The sample, collectively, referred to the following as works of art: painting, drawing, statue, sculpture, book, music CD, movie DVD, bible, cross, crucifix, flag, tapestry, carpet, rug, quilt, patchwork, furniture, coin, bottled wine, firearm, clock, jewelry, medallion, pottery, glass, poster, photograph, puzzle, car, musical instrument, costume, spice, food, and kitchenware.

### Analysis and results

The scale items measuring  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$  and  $N_U$  were subjected to varimax-rotated principal component analysis. The structure of loadings was satisfactory with explained variances of 0.71 for the two dimensions of identification (i.e.  $N_{SA}$  and  $N_{GI}$ ) and 0.77 for the three dimensions of CNFU (i.e.  $N_U$ ). Table I presents the scales developed in this study and their underlying structures. An inter-item correlation matrix was designed using  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ ,  $N_U$ , and  $A_E$  items (see Table II). A close inspection of this matrix (not

Table II Statistics and inter-factor correlation matrix

	$M_{Bi}$	$SD_{Bi}$	$M_{Mono}$	$M_{Mono}$	$A_E$	$N_{SA}$	$N_{GI}$	$N_U$	$E_i$
$A_E$	3.29	0.84	3.15	0.90	0.78				
$N_{SA}$	3.48	0.91	2.77	0.87	0.05	0.76			
$N_{GI}$	3.11	1.01	2.52	0.83	0.35 *	0.42 *	0.81		
$N_U$	2.98	0.93	3.06	0.95	0.37 *	0.06	0.04	0.80 <sup>a</sup>	
$E_i$	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	0.04	0.34 *	0.27 *	0.05	N.A.
$A_C$	18.85	6.23	13.22	5.14	0.34 *	0.21 *	0.17 *	0.19 *	0.59 *

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Average; \* $p < 0.01$ ;  $n = 178$ ; Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ; Correlations involving  $R_i$  are biserial

shown here) shows higher within-factor correlations compared to cross-factor correlation. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$  and  $A_E$  were 0.76, 0.81, and 0.78, respectively. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the three dimensions of CNFU including creative, unpopular and minority choices were 0.82, 0.78, 0.80, respectively. These results suggest that measurement scales have adequate levels of convergence and discriminant validities. Among inter-factor correlations, the only significant correlates of  $N_U$  were  $A_E$  and  $A_C$ . The correlations of  $A_E$  with  $E_i$  and with  $N_{SA}$  were not significant. All other correlations were significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

### Group mean differences

Before proceeding to test the hypotheses, three control variables need be checked as possible confounding differences between biculturals and monoculturals. If one or more of these differences turn out significant, their effect will have to be accounted for before the hypotheses can be tested. The first control variable is  $A_E$ . Biculturals' mean score (3.29) on this variable showed a non-significant difference ( $t = 1.23$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) from monoculturals' (3.15). The second control variable, annual household income, was not a significant difference between monoculturals and biculturals ( $t = 0.62$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). The third control variable, social class, was a composite, five-point item pooling together education, occupation and annual household income (Solomon, 2008). Biculturals' mean score (2.89) on this variable showed a non-significant difference ( $t = 1.48$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) from monoculturals' (3.03). These findings increase the confidence in the ensuing hypothesis testing.

$H1$  suggests that biculturals have greater  $N_{SA}$  than monoculturals. Biculturals' mean score (3.48) on this variable was significantly higher than monoculturals' (2.77;  $t = 4.1$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  $H1$  is supported.  $H2$  holds that biculturals have greater  $N_{GI}$  than monoculturals. Biculturals' mean score (3.11) on this variable was significantly higher than monoculturals' (2.52;  $t = 3.4$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  $H2$  is supported.  $H3$  considered no significant difference between biculturals and monoculturals in terms of  $N_U$ . Biculturals' mean score (2.98) on this variable was not significantly different from monoculturals' (3.06;  $t = .92$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ).  $H3$  is supported.  $H4$  predicted that biculturals, compared to monoculturals, would consume more artwork. Before this hypothesis could be tested, it should be checked whether biculturals and monoculturals differ in terms of the number and type of products they cited as artwork. To examine this possible confounding factor, the two groups were compared based on the range of products cited as artwork and specific products named. This comparison was

carried out by creating a separate frequency table for each of the two groups and comparing the two tables. The tables were highly similar and, therefore, it was justified to go ahead with the testing of *H4*. The mean number of artwork pieces possessed by biculturals (18.85) was significantly greater than that possessed by monoculturals (13.22;  $t = 12.6$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). *H4* is supported.

Next, a bivariate analysis of variance was conducted to observe whether the inflated type I error due to the multiplicity of *t*-tests was undermining the conclusions. The dichotomous nature of  $E_I$ , the independent variable, necessitated the use of Hotelling's  $T^2$ , a specialized form of MANOVA, which is a direct extension of the univariate *t*-test (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Box's  $M$  (25.9;  $F = 1.94$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) indicates that the variance within the bicultural portion of the sample ( $n = 87$ ) is fairly comparable to that in the monocultural portion ( $n = 251$ ). Therefore, bivariate equality of variances across ethnic groups is satisfied. The bivariate model was significant (Hotelling's  $T^2 = 32.8$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and the results remained consistent with the simple *t*-tests. This increases confidence in the tested hypotheses.

**Multiple regression**

A three-stage hierarchical regression was used to test *H5* (i.e. whether  $E_I$ ,  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$ , and  $N_U$  are significant predictors of  $A_C$ ). The results of this analysis are provided in Table III. In the first stage, only  $A_E$  was included as a predictor of  $A_C$ . The model explained a significant portion of the variation in the dependent variable ( $R^2 = .23$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and  $A_E$  significantly predicted  $A_C$  ( $\beta = 8.13$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This stage indicates that, regardless of one's ethnic identity, general interest in art may predict artwork consumption. In the second stage, the mindset variables (i.e.  $N_{SA}$ ,  $N_{GI}$  and  $N_U$ ) were included in the model in addition to  $A_E$ . The explanatory power showed an increase in the second stage ( $R^2 = .28$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Significant predictors of  $A_C$  included  $A_E$  ( $\beta = 2.89$ ;  $p = .019$ ),  $N_{SA}$  ( $\beta = 5.34$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and  $N_{GI}$  ( $\beta = 7.98$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  $N_U$  ( $\beta = 1.22$ ;  $p = 0.259$ ) was not significant. In the third stage,  $E_I$  ( $\beta = 0.42$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) was added to the pool of predictor variables. The explanatory power of the model once again showed a material increase ( $R^2 = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).  $N_U$  ( $\beta = 1.02$ ;  $p = 0.384$ ) remained non-significant, but  $A_E$  ( $\beta = 3.11$ ;  $p = 0.016$ ),  $N_{SA}$  ( $\beta = 2.01$ ;  $p = 0.028$ )  $N_{GI}$  ( $\beta = 6.32$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and  $E_I$  ( $\beta = 11.15$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) were significant predictors of  $A_C$ .

To observe whether including  $E_I$  in stage three substantively enhances the explanatory power, a partial *F* test was conducted (Malhotra, 2006, p. 570):

$$\text{Partial}F(E_I) = (R^2 - R^2)/[(1 - R^2)/(error\text{df}_{stage3})]$$

Partial *F* for  $E_I$  was 24.3, indicating strong support for substantive superiority of the third model to the other two models. This strong partial *F* is consistent with the biserial (instead of Pearson product moment because  $E_I$  is dichotomous) correlation of .59 between  $E_I$  and  $A_C$  (Huck, 2004, p. 65). These results provide support for *H5a*, *H5b*, and *H5d*. Need for uniqueness was the only non-significant predictor of  $A_C$ . *H5c* is not supported.

**Discussion and implications**

As partial manifestations of globalization, businesses are challenged today in several ways by the rise and proliferation of the bicultural neotribe (Maffesoli, 1996). Businesses do not have to fall victim to these challenges; they can turn them around and strategically leverage them as marketplace opportunities. A key requisite, however, is to develop an understanding of the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings evident in consumer markets (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). As an attempt in that direction, the present paper draws on an interdisciplinary body of knowledge and an empirical study to shed light on the personality traits and identity negotiation in the neglected segment of bicultural consumers. Overall, the findings indicate that biculturals, relative to monoculturals, are characterized by higher levels of needs for social acceptability and group identification; have almost equal levels of need for uniqueness and art enthusiasm; and tend to consume more artwork as a means and in the process of the routine negotiation of their (ethnic) identities. Three areas deserve further illumination.

First, previous research indicates that biculturals are more concerned than monoculturals about their social acceptance in general and their acceptance within pertinent reference groups (Gibbs, 1997; Herring, 1992; Omi and Winant, 1994). The survey results confirm this point by revealing higher levels of need for social acceptability and group identification among biculturals, relative to monoculturals. This finding is consistent with both identity formation and symbolic interactionism theories. Identity formation theory suggests that bicultural identity can result in the development of a contingent self-concept malleable to sociocultural peculiarities of the environment (Bowles, 1993). The relatively high levels of anxiety observed among biculturals is directly associated with the strength of their urge to conform to the values and norms in their social surroundings (Herring, 1992). The relatively higher levels of needs for social acceptability and group identification, therefore, help alleviate identity problems and desirability anxiety and stress (Gibbs, 1997). Symbolic interactionism theory suggests that bicultural identity can complicate and intensify the individual's inevitable task of symbolically asserting and negotiating his or her self-identity (Gordon, 1964). The increased complexity and intensity in the symbolic realm of bicultural identity propel the individual to feel greater needs for conformity and identification (Piskacek and Golub, 1973).

Second, the literature on bicultural identity is not clear whether biculturals and monoculturals differ in terms of need for uniqueness; and if they do, which population shows a higher level of this need (Rockquemore and Brunnsa, 2002). Some researchers provide evidence for the high levels of creativity, inventiveness, originality, adaptability, resiliency, competence

**Table III** Hierarchical regression results – dependent variable:  $A_C$

	$\beta$	SE	p	$\beta$	SE	p	$\beta$	SE	p
Constant	-19.49	3.60	0.000	-16.06	3.38	0.000	-13.22	3.12	0.000
$A_E$	8.13	2.48	0.000	2.89	1.32	0.019	3.11	1.30	0.016
$N_{SA}$				5.34	2.01	0.000	2.01	1.32	0.028
$N_{GI}$				7.98	2.11	0.000	6.32	2.71	0.000
$N_U$				1.22	0.86	0.259	1.02	1.01	0.384
$R_I$							11.15	2.42	0.000

Notes:  $n = 178$  in all models; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.23$ ; 0.28; 0.32 from left to right, all significant at  $p < 0.001$

and leadership among biculturals (Cauce *et al.*, 1992; Fields, 1996), which might lead to intensive pursuit of uniqueness in general and within the consumption sphere. Other researchers argue that urge for uniqueness is lower in consumers who experience confusion regarding their ethnicities and whose multiple identity anchors can result in confusion and dilemma (Gibbs, 1973; Piskacek and Golub, 1973). Although the current research does not entirely settle the controversy, the empirical results provide support that biculturals and monoculturals are comparable in terms of need for uniqueness.

Third, the association between ethnic identity and artwork consumption has not been directly examined in the past. The survey detected a marked difference between biculturals and monoculturals in terms of their artwork consumption and, by implication, market-mediated (ethnic) identity negotiation. Specifically, biculturals appear to consume more artwork than monoculturals. Works of art constitute the prime examples of material culture, on which consumers can draw to negotiate symbolic meanings about themselves and others (Belk, 1988; Bourdieu, 1984). Since biculturals face a more complex and intensive task of symbolic identity communication (Gordon, 1964), they might exhibit greater reliance on the material culture to successfully carry out the task. In fact, biculturals are more likely to exaggerate in their conspicuous adoption and consumption of the symbolic attitudes, behaviors, and objects of one or more of their ethnicities (Gibbs, 1973). They, therefore, are more likely than monoculturals to consume artwork.

Fourth, ethnicity, need for social acceptability, need for group identification, and art enthusiasm, taken together, can predict artwork consumption. Ethnicity, in particular, is a key precursor of artwork consumption. Ethnicity as a market-segmentation criterion has not received deserved attention.

Biculturals satisfy the various tests of market segment viability: measurability, accessibility, substantiality, differentiability, and actionability (Kotler and Armstrong, 2003). Since positional advantage in the market is dependent on effective market segmentation and informed resource allocation (Day and Wensley, 1988), isolating biculturals is becoming a business imperative, especially for art-related businesses. Differentiation, branding, advertising, and corporate sponsorship are only a few strategies that need to be guided by an understanding of the peculiarities of (multi)ethnic identity.

### Limitations and future research

The representation of monocultural and bicultural populations through Caucasian Americans and Mexican Americans and inclusion of only three personality traits are two limitations of this research. Future research can extend this work in two ways. First, it can extend the analysis to other monocultural and multicultural groups. As a corollary of this extension, other sources of consumer identities such as religion and gender can be added. Second, a wider or different set of personality traits might be considered.

This paper held the interrelationships among the focal variables constant. The findings, however, point to the possibility that ethnic identity serves as an antecedent to needs for social acceptability and group identification. Consumers who identify with more than one ethnicity were found to have greater levels of such needs. To this end, future research can focus exclusively on these interrelationships,

while employing better controlled methods of measurement such as experiments. Another limitation was the types of artwork included in this study. It is interesting to observe whether biculturals and monoculturals also differ in the consumption of more mundane products such as casual apparel, personal accessories, and stationery.

Use of symbolic interactionism in marketing research has been sparse. An exception is Leigh and Gabel (1992) work, which uses this theory and concludes that consumers with high desire to gain membership in a particular social group can be regarded as a segment. Marketing researchers interested in symbolic interactionism should, however, be aware of the inconsistent conclusions it has entailed. One such inconsistency was that of need for uniqueness in the present study. After its original notions are revisited and its contentions substantiated, symbolic interactionism can be especially useful in cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior.

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## Further reading

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## About the author

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## Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

*This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of this article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefits of the material present.*

Advances in telecommunications and information technology have helped fuel the incessant march of globalization. A key consequence of this development has been a merging of cultures to an extent never experienced before. New and mixed consumer identities are evolving as a result and marketers are acknowledging the potential to use biculturalism as a means to identify distinct consumer segments.

### How multiethnic identity is constructed

Analysts had earlier claimed that ethnicity would vanish in the modern world but the opposite has occurred. Its resurgence also owes plenty to the spectacular rise during recent decades of interethnic marriages and the subsequent production of bicultural offspring. Increased migration, legislation and celebration of ethnic pride are other factors to impact on ethnic identity. New advances in marketing that have enabled more narrowly defined segments to be identified are likewise cited as significant.

Psychological studies into the ethnicity construct have often proposed that ethnic identity is ascribed by others like friends, researchers and even strangers. However, a key premise of the current research is to consider ethnic identity as a "cultural meaning" that is self-defined. The logic behind this is the demand for recognition as a "distinct ethnic category" by multiethnic consumers in the USA. Legislators in the same country have also now empowered consumers to pronounce their own ethnic identity, where it was previously determined biologically.

Scholars have employed two different theoretical perspectives to explain how personality traits develop among multiethnic individuals. The psychoanalytic school forwards the idea that both ethnic and ego identities are simultaneously formed during adolescence. Another key component of such theories is that interaction with their environment enables development of "multiple selves" that individuals switch between in the quest to sustain a harmonious relationship with their social environs.

According to the sociological perspective, identity is produced through "socioculturally constructed meanings" derived from words, actions and objects in the human world. This view argues that bicultural identity is possible because meanings are subject to constant negotiation and change within "a myriad of social interactions" and contexts.

It has been suggested the extant literature indicates that self-esteem is lower and identity confusion more prevalent among biculturals, giving rise to more psychological and behavioral problems. There are likewise those who conclude that such individuals yearn for identification and a sense of belonging and will "adopt the symbolic attitudes and behaviors" of one or more of their multiple ethnicities in an attempt to fulfill these desires. These adoptions may also be done to excess.

Zolfagharian proposes that biculturals may aspire to identify with a wider range of social groups than monocultural consumers and exhibit a greater need for social acceptability and group identification as a result. Earlier studies into a desire to be considered unique among monoculturals and multiethnic consumers have provided contrasting results leading to expectations here that little difference will prevail between the two groups.

Evidence exists to show that consumption of a wide range of material products and services also plays a role in the development and negotiation of identity. Analysts point out that the purchase of artwork illustrates this point because different meanings are created during the production, display and consumption stages. Belief also exists that art consumption relates to social meanings and roles and provides a conscious or subconscious vehicle for individuals to convey and negotiate their "multifaceted identities". Since biculturals are thought to express symbolic meaning and identity through different material aspects of a community's culture, art consumption is especially significant. In the same way, it is felt that membership of art institutions creates bonds between consumers and helps to satisfy yearnings for social acceptability and group identification. For these reasons, it is contended that biculturals are likelier than monoculturals to purchase and consume artwork.

The literature is used by Zolfagharian to develop various hypotheses, which are tested in the present work. Participants were obtained for a survey conducted in three cities located close to a leading university in Southwest USA. Respondents were asked to assert whether they regarded themselves as being Caucasian-American, Mexican or Mixed Caucasian-Mexican. Of the 178 usable responses obtained, 98 were monoculturals and 80 bioculturals. Females and males correspondingly accounted for virtually half of the sample and over 60 percent of respondents were aged between 26 and 35. Social class distribution was considered normal.

Analysis of results indicated that the need for group identification and social acceptability was higher among bicultural respondents. These findings were anticipated, as

was the lack of notable difference between the groups in relation to desire for uniqueness. Tests showed close similarities in the items each group regarded as art and the hypothesis that biculturals consume more art than monoculturals was subsequently upheld. The belief that asserted ethnic identity along with need for social acceptability, group identification and unique could predict artwork consumption was also tested. All except for the uniqueness element were supported.

#### Conclusions and further research

Greater awareness of the potential for a proliferation of meaning and cultural groups in today's marketplace will help marketers identify and exploit the opportunities that arise. One potentially key aspect is the issue of uniqueness. It is suggested that an intense desire to be regarded as unique will be reflected in such as creativity, inventiveness and originality and may well have implications for consumption. However, current and earlier findings suggest that biculturals are similar to monocultural consumers in this respect.

But indications that other factors examined can predict artwork consumption is useful for market segmentation

objectives. Zolfagharian considers multiethnic consumers as a viable market segment because the study has shown it to be among other things identifiable, measurable and accessible. It is likewise pointed out that knowledge of group peculiarities can help marketers succeed with branding, differentiation and advertising.

The author believes future study should consider other monocultural and multiethnic groups and also explore how aspects like gender and religion impact on identity. Widening the number of personality traits is another possibility. A further option is to include different types of artwork and investigate whether or not the consumption of more everyday items differs between the two groups. Scope likewise exists to further examine the impact of ethnicity on the desire for group identification and social acceptance using such as controlled experiments.

*(A précis of the article "Identification, uniqueness and art consumption among bicultural consumers". Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)*

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